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MONTANA TO 'STITCH' ITS HEART INTO NATIONAL 911 FLAG

Rally round the flag is a sturdy phrase that brings Americans of all walks of life and political persuasions together in times of trouble.

On Aug. 4 at noon in the State Capitol Rotunda in Helena, Montanans are invited to be part of a ceremony that will see some of our state's heroes sew parts of flags flown over our capitol to help restore a flag that was nearly destroyed in the World Trade Center disaster Sept. 11, 2001.

"Symbolism is very much a part of history," Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees President Steve Lozar of Polson said. "We have been honored to be part of a national effort that will demonstrate to the world our resolve not to surrender to, or be intimidated, by terrorism. This will be a great day for Montanans of all walks of life to come together to celebrate our freedom."

The "New York Says Thank You Foundation" is taking the National 9/11 Flag on a journey across America to honoring local service heroes by having them help stitch the flag back to its original state using pieces of fabric from American flags destined for retirement in each state. The Historical Society was honored to be asked to organize the event, Lozar said.

Montanans can nominate a local hero for the honor by logging on to www.National911Flag.org and clicking on "Nominate a Service Hero." They can be a wounded warrior, military veteran, first responder, educator, student or volunteer service leader.

After the selected heroes stitch, all those who attend will be invited to stitch a stitch into the flag. Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger will represent Montana in the program, which will include a color guard, Native American honor song, and free refreshments after the ceremony.

The flag will be displayed in the rotunda with the Society's "Native Words, Native Warriors" exhibit that honors Native American and all Montana military veterans. "This exhibit has touched a patriotic cord as we have taken it across the state in the past year and a half," Lozar said.

Once the flag is restored and made whole again it will be used in 10th anniversary of 911 ceremonies later this year, and will become part of the permanent collection of the National September 11 Memorial Museum being built at the World Trade Center.

Those who have already been honored to stitch the flag include soldiers and schoolchildren who survived the shooting in Fort Hood, Texas, WWII veterans on the deck of the USS Missouri in Pearl Harbor, descendants of Martin Luther King Jr. and many others. A part of the American flag that cradled Abraham Lincoln's head when he was shot at Ford's Theater also was stitched into the flag.